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NIE-42: THE CURRENT SITUATION IN ALBANIA, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE
TO GREEK, YUGOSLAV AND ITALIAN INTERESTS AND PRETENSIONS

THE CURRENT SITUATION IN ALBANIA

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The Stability of the Regime and Extent of Soviet Control

Prior to the Cominform-Yugoslav rift in June 1948, Albania had been both closely tied, ~~with~~ politically and economically, to Yugoslavia. Rather than follow Marshal Tito's heresy, however, Hoxha chose the Moscow camp and launched a vigorous campaign for the elimination of "nationalist" elements in Albania. This campaign was initiated by Hoxha's chief lieutenant, Koci Xoxe, and culminated in the latter's own arrest, conviction, and execution. Hoxha not only skillfully extricated Albania from its ties with Yugoslavia, emphasizing his loyalty to Moscow, but also removed his leading rival. Xoxe was replaced by the present Minister of Interior, Lt. Gen. ^E ~~MA~~ Mehmet Shehu, and although there are reports of rivalry between Shehu and Hoxha, the latter apparently enjoys the favor of the Kremlin, and Shehu, Moscow-trained but undistinguished as a politician, appears to have little chance of supplanting Hoxha.

Moscow, for its part, has recognized the importance of Albania
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as a pro-Stalinist outpost in the Mediterranean area, and following the Tito-Cominform rift, increased its aid and support to the Hoxha government, replacing the support formerly received from Yugoslavia.

Albania is dependent upon Soviet economic support to the extent that, without it, the country's economy would collapse within a few months. In addition to the control with which this situation provides the USSR, an estimated 1,000 Soviet military and civilian "experts" hold key positions in the police, military, and civilian administrations as well as in the ^{party} ~~party~~ hierarchy.

Soviet control of Albania is thus assured and the native leadership of Hoxha and Shehu has thus far succeeded in controlling the country through the usual Communist methods of police terror and rigid economic controls. The leadership of the armed forces and the majority of the security forces are loyal to the party and constitute an effective force for the suppression of opposition.

Resistance to the Present regime.

Dissatisfaction among the Albanian people is widespread, however, and the majority of the people are opposed to the Hoxha regime. There has been

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some overt resistance within the past few years, but it has apparently not been too effective. The regime itself has admitted the existence of "diversionist" elements, particularly among the peasantry, and has admitted attacks upon military and civilian supply convoys. The most dramatic incident of resistance activity was the bombing of the Soviet Legation in ~~XXXX~~ February 1951; however, instances of economic sabotage and local assassinations have probably been more effective in challenging Communist authority. The authorities have adjusted their repressive measures to the situation, and, for example, Shehu, has organized special pursuit battalions which operate in the mountainous areas against individual resistance groups. Refugees have reported the existence of various local groups, such as the "National League of the Mountains," "Liberty," "Skanderbeg," "~~XXXXXXXXXX~~" "Call" and "Bashkimi i Kombit," but specific information regarding these groups is lacking. There does not appear to be any established cooperation among the various groups despite their common desire to rid Albania of Communist control.

Of the Albanian emigre movements active in resistance measures,

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the Committee for a Free ~~EE~~ Albania, an affiliate of the National Committee for a Free Europe with operational headquarters in Rome, is probably the most influential with resistance groups within Albania. The Committee's activities within Albania have, of necessity been limited to propaganda work and some subversive activity by agents, ~~and~~ its most effective operation thus far has been the dropping of propaganda leaflets over Albania. The leaflets caused considerable excitement within the country, prompting a note of protest to the Italian government, and encouraged numerous Albanians to flee Albania with the hope of joining the Committee in its struggle against the Hoxha regime. Three groups make up the Committee: (1) the National Agrarian Democratic Party Balli Kombetar ~~headed by Hasan Dosti~~, (2) the Legality Party (pro-King Zog) ~~headed by Aliu Kaya~~, and (3) the League of Peasants and Villagers ~~headed by Aliu Kaya~~. The first, Balli Kombetar, has the strongest following in southern Albania; the second, the Legality Party, in central and northern Albania; and the third, the League of Peasants and Villagers, has its strongest following in the extreme north and in the neighboring Yugoslav provinces ~~inhabited largely by Albanians~~.

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In addition to the Committee for a free Albania, there is in Italy a party known as Biloku Kombetar Independent made up of pro-Italian Albanians.

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This group cooperated with Italy before and during the war

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Of particular current interest is the recently created League of Albanian Political Refugees in Yugoslavia claiming to represent some 5,000 Albanian refugees. The League is composed largely of Albanian Communists who fled Albania since 1948, and, despite its proclaimed objective of "an independent, free, indivisible democratic and republican" Albania, was actually created by Belgrade as an instrument of Yugoslav policy. While the League has already engaged in some subversive activity and propaganda work, and obviously possesses a considerable potential, Yugoslavia's own exposed position has probably deterred Tito from yet using the League to the full.

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In Greece, most of the Albanian refugees are from southern Albania (Northern Epirus), which Greece claims, and their activities are aimed at eventual Greek annexation of that area. Their efforts have, therefore, been largely in the field of espionage, propaganda and encouragement of additional refugees.

Thus, in addition to the local resistance groups, there are operating within Albania, agents of these four major refugee organizations: the Committee for a Free Albania and the pro-Italian, Greek and Yugoslav organizations. Their activities are unrelated and their objectives frequently conflict. These factors, plus the lack of coordination among the local groups, has considerably simplified the task of the Albanian security forces in isolating and destroying individual groups.

Under present circumstances, resistance activity constitutes a constant problem of harassment to the Hoxha regime. It is not, however, on such a scale as to present an immediate threat to the regime. As long as the resistance effort is diffused and does not receive substantial external aid, the Albanian security forces will probably succeed in

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ALBANIA

Despite the fact the prospects for the overthrow of the Hoxha regime in the near future are not promising, Albania, nevertheless constitutes a problem of current importance in the Eastern Mediterranean. This arises particularly out of Albania's strategic location on the shores of the Adriatic. Naval forces based on Saseno Island and the port of Valona, for example, could readily control the Adriatic. For the Soviet Union, Albania represents an advance base which, with proper development, could be used for Soviet air and naval forces in the Mediterranean. Saseno island was, in fact, an Italian submarine base and there have been recurrent rumors in the post war years of Soviet efforts to reconstruct these facilities. There is no confirmed evidence, however, of such extensive efforts ~~in~~ or of the island actually being used as a base. Similarly, there is no confirmed evidence of Soviet efforts to build up Albanian air facilities, a step which would greatly enhance Soviet air power in the Mediterranean.

~~Albania~~
In the event of war in the Balkans, ~~it~~ could play an important role in Soviet or Satellite strategy. Not only does it provide an advance base

on the Adriatic, but if forces from Bulgaria and Albania could effect a

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juncture in the narrow portion of Yugoslavia north of the Greek border, 1/
Yugoslavia would be completely cut off from Greece, and if in addition
naval forces (presumably Soviet) were available to command the Straits of
Otranto, the Adriatic could be closed as a line of supply to Yugoslavia.
Any significant strengthening of military facilities in Albania might
well be a prelude to possible Soviet/Satellite action against Yugoslavia.

Despite obvious Soviet interests in Albania, the USSR, apparently
in a desire to leave the situation fluid and to avoid a potentially
embarrassing commitment, has failed to conclude a mutual assistance pact
with Albania. 2/ In fact, Albania has such a pact only with Bulgaria
(16 December 1947), a step which was reportedly preliminary to the projected
Balkan Federation under discussion at that time by Tito and Dimitrov.
This lack of Soviet or Satellite commitments to Albania should not be
interpreted as indicative of lack of interest or concern; it is rather a
matter of expediency.

1/ The distance between Bulgaria and Albania in this area is less than
125 miles.

2/ Other Satellites which have not concluded mutual assistance pacts with
the USSR are Eastern Germany and North Korea.

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CONFLICTING INTERESTS OF ITALY, YUGOSLAVIA AND GREECE

Largely because of its commanding position on the Adriatic coast, Albania is an object of concern to its neighbors and their individual interests conflict to such an extent that, even under present circumstances, the problem of Albania complicates the development of good relations and cooperation among Italy, Yugoslavia and Greece. Complete cooperation in military planning by these countries would be highly desirable for the effective defense of southeastern Europe and the eastern Mediterranean. No such steps are currently being taken, although there have recently been vague indications that Greece and Yugoslavia might be willing to exchange vital defense information under certain circumstances. There are, of course, problems other than that of Albania, some of them, such as Trieste for example, of greater importance, which mitigate against the development of cooperative defensive efforts, but these are beyond the scope of this paper.

Italian interests

Italy's interest in Albania has always been primarily strategic in nature, seeking to prevent any other power from dominating the Adriatic

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through control of the Albanian coast. For this reason, Italy supported the creation of an independent Albania in 1912 and later, in 1914, occupied the island of Saseno and the port of Valona. Italian troops remained in occupation until 1920, at which time they were forced to evacuate the mainland, but retained Saseno which was converted into a strong naval and submarine base. In 1921, the Conference of Ambassadors (Great Britain, France, Italy and Japan) signed an agreement giving Italy a virtual protectorate over Albania. Italian influence was ~~not~~ manifested by financial loans, Italian management of nearly all important economic enterprises, and Italian training and equipping of the armed forces. In 1939, Mussolini united Albania with Italy, and in 1940, launched his invasion of Greece from there.

Under the Italian Peace Treaty (1947), Italy recognized the independence of Albania, ceded Saseno island, and renounced all public and private property rights, concessions, claims, etc. in Albania.

Italian policy towards Albania since the end of the war and signature of the Peace Treaty has been directed at a dual objective: the denial of the area to other powers and the restoration of Italian economic and political

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influence in Albania. In its official statements, the Italian Foreign Office has emphasized that continued Albanian independence and territorial integrity correspond with Italian interests, but Italian efforts to improve relations have made no progress with the present Communist regime. An Italian mission was sent to Albania soon after the war to examine questions of interest to both countries, but was soon asked to leave. Diplomatic relations were reestablished in 1949 and, despite Communist restrictions on the Italian Legation in Tirana, Italy undoubtedly intends to retain such relations.

Under present circumstances, Italian policy is of necessity directed toward the future, and Italy hopes to reestablish its influence through the pro-Italian exile group, *Biloku Kombetar* Independent. Italy is particularly apprehensive of possible Yugoslav pre-eminence in Albania in the event the Hoxha regime should be overthrown at some future date. Italian strategic interests in Albania are sufficiently great and its desire to avoid the establishment of a foothold in Albania by any other power is sufficiently strong that Italy probably prefers continuation of the status

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to the creation of a power vacuum into which Yugoslavia and, possibly
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Greece, could move. In this connection, Italy is also suspicious of British intentions vis-a-vis Albania.

~~XX~~ Greek interests

Greek interests in Albania center around Greek claims to southern Albania (Northern Epirus), an area which the Greeks occupied from 1912 to 1916 and which they have consistently claimed on historical, ethnic, strategic and economic grounds. The Greeks also are acutely aware that Albania served as a base for the Italian attack on Greece in 1940 and, in the post war years, for Greek guerrilla operations. Even at present, Albania is the major base from which Communist agents are infiltrated into Greece.

The Greeks probably look on partition of Albania between Greece and Yugoslavia as the ideal solution to the problem. They are apprehensive of possible Yugoslav or Italian domination of the country, and would probably attempt to occupy Northern Epirus in the xx event of any such military action in the area as a Yugoslav invasion of Albania. For the present, in the absence of Allied assurances against possible Italian or Yugoslav

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~~SECRET~~
-13-
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domination of Albania, Greece probably prefers continuation of the status quo, at least so long as the Hoxha regime does not revive full scale support to the Greek guerrillas.

Greece, like Italy and Yugoslavia, is attempting to further its policy through the use of Albanian refugees. Those in Greece are primarily from southern Albania and are apparently concentrated in camps along the Albanian border. The Greek government does not permit them to emigrate or to become Greek citizens. Some of those in the camp at Yannina are reported to be formed into military units, intended for use in southern Albania in the ~~event~~ of any eventuality.

Yugoslav interests

Yugoslavia, and before it Serbia and Montenegro, has always opposed the principle of an independent Albania. During and immediately after World War I the Serbs occupied northern Albania and did not withdraw until 1921. In 1926, Yugoslavia finally accepted the Albanian frontier as delineated in 1913. Until the outbreak of World War II, Italian domination of Albania was sufficient to prevent Yugoslavia from exercising any influence

CONFIDENTIAL

-14-

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This situation changed radically during World War II when Tito, through Albanian Communists managed to obtain control of the Albanian National Liberation Movement. During the war, Tito's control was exercised largely through emissaries attached to the headquarters of the Albanian Army of National Liberation, and, from 1944 to 1945, Albania was a puppet of Yugoslavia. In 1948, Hoxha was able to extricate Albania from its ties with Yugoslavia. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ largely because the nature of the Tito-Cominform rift and the circumstances surrounding it.

Since 1948, Tito has ostensibly championed the principle of an independent, sovereign Albania and has condemned Greek territorial claims and alleged Greek proposals for the partition of Albania between Greece and Yugoslavia. In the past several months, Yugoslav propaganda has also charged Italy with encouraging Albanian exile plans for an "ethnic" Albania which would include the Yugoslav provinces of Kosovo and Metohiya, both populated chiefly by Albanians. Tito's actual intentions appear to be the eventual creation of an anti-Stalinist, pro-Tito regime in Albania and a return to the status of 1944-1948. It was apparently to this end that the "League of Albanian Political Refugees in Yugoslavia" was

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formed in May 1951. At the same time, however, Yugoslav spokesmen have at various times expressed the fear that any substantial efforts to overthrow the Hoxha regime might be taken by the USSR as a pretext for military action against Yugoslavia.

THE POSSIBILITY OF A SETTLEMENT

As can be readily seen, the interests of the neighboring states are largely incompatible although all three countries would presumably wish to see the ^{eventual} liquidation of ~~the present regime in~~ ~~Communist control of~~ Albania. The policy of each individual country since the geographic isolation of Albania in 1948 has been directed at establishing a position from which it could dominate the country in the event of the over throw of the Hoxha regime. As a result, each country has been suspicious of the moves of the others and has sought to ^{counter} ~~counter~~ them. One result of this has been the diffusion of resistance efforts within Albania which has contributed greatly to their ineffectiveness.

The possibility of any lasting agreement arrived at voluntarily by Italy, Yugoslavia and Greece as to the future of Albania appears slight.

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Neither Yugoslavia or Italy could be expected to acquiesce in the domination of Albania by the other. The Greeks would be apprehensive of any solution giving either Italy or Yugoslavia pre-eminence in Albania and have ~~xx~~ officially stated that they would not countenance any solution in which Greece was not consulted. Despite Yugoslav statements to the contrary, Greek-Yugoslav interests in Albania might be solved by partition, but such a solution would not be acceptable to the Italians. Italian participation in any partition would not be acceptable to ^{*Yugoslavia which would not*} countenance ^{*any*} resurgence of Italian influence in the Balkans.

Any solution to the problem of Albania would require the intervention, to some degree, of the Western powers. Both Italy and Yugoslavia, are at least officially committed to the preservation of Albania's independence and territorial integrity, although neither would accept an Albanian regime under the dominant influence of the other. However, sufficient pressure from the Western powers, the isolation of political elements identified too closely with either Rome or Belgrade, and assurances from the Western powers of a sovereign and independent Albania might

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induce the Italian and Yugoslav governments to accept ~~an~~ an Albanian regime composed of uncompromised and moderate elements.

Because of its claims to "Northern Epirus," which would be thwarted in the event of Western recognition of a new Albanian regime Greece, would find it more difficult to agree to such a solution. Also, the Greeks would not countenance a pro-Italian or pro-Yugoslav regime and would, therefore, probably demand Allied assurances against Yugoslav and Italian aspirations in Albania. Greece would probably be more amenable to such a solution if it could obtain Yugoslav assurances on Aegean Macedonia and a British promise of the eventual return of Cyprus to Greece.

PROBABLE DEVELOPMENTS IN THE EVENT OF THE OVERTHROW OF THE HOXHA REGIME

If, as appears unlikely, the Hoxha regime should be overthrown in the near future under such circumstances that the USSR or the Satellites found it undesirable to intervene, the attitudes of Italy, Yugoslavia and Greece would depend largely upon the nature of the revolt and the character of the successor regime. Should control of Albania pass to any group closely associated with one of the neighboring countries, serious friction, although possibly no actual hostilities, would probably arise, perhaps

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leading to the occupation of southern Albania by Greece, northern Albania by Yugoslavia, and Saseno, Valona and environs by Italy.

Should the Hoxha regime be overthrown by a broad combination of internal and external non-Communist elements, Greece, Italy and Yugoslavia might not intervene directly, but each may be expected to work feverishly to win to its side the leaders of the new government. The attitude of the Western powers would, under these circumstances, largely determine whether or not the effects of the neighboring states would exceed political and economic maneuvering.

Albania saved by non-Communist elements
Within Albania, political responsibility would probably fall initially to the leading elements which make up the Committee for a Free Albania. However, the ideological differences and distrust within the Committee would make such a regime short-lived. The problem might be resolved by the restoration of King Zog and the formation of a non-Communist national government firmly under his control. Zog's popularity is believed to have increased as a result of his war-time policies and also of the oppression of the present regime. Furthermore, he is probably the only leader who

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could restrain the right-wing groups, and he would also probably be
acceptable to Italy and Greece.

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